

Home Modifications

Home modifications

Home modifications are major or minor changes to the home environment to make it safer and easier to carry out tasks and maintain independence.

Home modifications are important

Most Californians say they prefer to spend their senior years in their own homes, but they often live in older homes not built for aging in place.

Typically, there are three areas in the home that present



barriers to safety and independence: steps and doors in and out of the home, stairs inside the home and the bathroom.

Your home can be modified to make it safer, more comfortable and easier for you to carry out such daily activities as cooking, bathing and climbing stairs.

Modifications can be as simple as installing grab bars, hand-held showerheads and lever door handles, and improving lighting. More complex modifications may include widening doorways to accommodate wheelchairs and other assistive devices, lowering counter tops or installing ramps or elevators.

People who benefit from home modifications

- Older individuals who want to age in place

- Families who have children with disabilities
- Adults with disabilities
- Baby Boomers planning for the future
- Families who bring aging parents into their homes
- People of all ages

Types of home modifications

There are many types of home modifications. Examples include:

Bathroom modifications:

- Install grab bars in the shower and around the toilet
- Install shower seats or transfer benches
- Place non-skid strips or decals in the tub or shower
- Install a hand-held shower head
- Install a floor-to-ceiling safety pole

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Access in and out of the home:

- Install permanent or portable ramps
- Widen doorways
- Install swing-clear hinges on doors

Getting up and down the stairs:

- Install handrails on both sides for support
- Install a stair glide—a track-mounted seat attached to one side of stairs
- Place reflective non-skid rubber strips on edge of steps

Other modifications:

- Install door grips on existing door knobs
- Replace door knobs with lever handles
- Place night-lights in hallways and other high-traffic areas
- Install a single-control extended faucet in the kitchen

Where to go for financial help for home modifications

Many of the home modifications mentioned here are low-cost and can be purchased at your local hardware store. For more extensive modifications, the following programs provide loans or free or reduced rate services. (Please note that funding sources differ by locality and may involve eligibility requirements.)

Rural housing services:

Various grants and loans are available for rural, low-income elders. For information, contact: (530) 792-5800 or <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ca/index.html>.

Multipurpose Senior Services Program (MSSP):

Arranges for and monitors services for frail elderly clients who wish to remain in their homes. Services include minor home repairs. For information, contact: 1-800-510-2020 or

<http://www.aging.ca.gov/html/programs/mssp.htm>.

CalHome Program: Awards state funds to local public and non-profit agencies to assist individual households with the construction, purchase and rehabilitation of single-family owner-occupied homes and manufactured homes.

For information, contact: (916) 327-3646 or <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/ca/calhome>.

Local city and county grants:

Many cities and towns use Community Development Block Grants and/or Social Services Block Grants to help citizens maintain and upgrade their homes. Contact your local Housing and Community Development and Social Services Departments (located in the white pages of your telephone book, under Government Listings).

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs): Local AAAs may

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provide funding for modifying and repairing homes. To contact the AAA in your area, call 1-800-510-2020. If in Los Angeles, call 1-800-834-4777. If you need information outside of your local area, call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116.

California Department of Community Services and Development: Provides funds to weatherize the homes of low-income persons to make them more energy-efficient. For a local service provider directory, call 1-800-433-4327, or visit the following Website: <http://www.csd.ca.gov/ProvidersDirectory.htm>.

California Department of Rehabilitation: Assists Californians with disabilities in maximizing their ability to live independently in their communities. It also supports Independent Living Centers (ILCs) located throughout

California that provide access to resources and services. For the location of the nearest ILC in your area, visit the Department of Rehabilitation's Website at <http://www.dor.ca.gov/ils/ilclist.htm>, or call the AT Network at TDD 1-800-390-2699; 1-800-900-0706.

Rehabilitation Mortgage Insurance: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has a program that may enable home buyers and homeowners to finance both the purchase (or refinance) of a home and the cost of its rehabilitation. Contact your local HUD field office through an FHA-lending institution or find the nearest lender by contacting HUD at 1-202-708-1112, or <http://www.hud.gov> or <http://www.hud.gov/il/code/llplcrit.html>.

Local Lenders and Banks: Some lenders offer reverse

mortgages that allow homeowners to turn the value of their home into cash, without having to move or make regular loan payments. For more information on reverse mortgages, contact the National Center for Home Equity Conversion (NCHEC) at 1-651-222-6775 or <http://www.reverse.org>. You may also contact the AARP Home Equity Information Center at 1-800-209-8085 or <http://www.aarp.org/hrevmort>, or call the Federal National Mortgage Association at 1-800-732-6643.

Good news for renters

Federal law makes it illegal for landlords to refuse "reasonable modifications" to a house or apartment if the tenant is willing to pay for the changes. The law also requires new construction of dwellings with four or more units to include such features as wheelchair accessibility, reinforced walls to accommodate grab bars and accessible electrical outlets and thermostats.

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Getting started

There are many resources available to consumers that provide publications and other educational materials on home modifications. The National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification at the University of Southern California has a Website (<http://homemods.org>) that can link you with many national associations and organizations that provide information on home modifications. In addition, the above Website also has a “Consumers Corner” section filled with documents and facts sheets.

The California Department of Aging can provide you with a *Home Safety Checklist*, which

is available in hard copy through its Website:
<http://www.aging.ca.gov>.

The California Department of Consumer Affairs, Contractors State License Board has information on what you should know before you hire a contractor. For more information, call 1-800-321-2752 or visit its Website at <http://www.cslb.ca.gov>.

Programs can also be located through your local Area Agency on Aging, senior center or independent living center.

Additional information

The California Department of Aging supports opportunities for Californians to live safely in their homes, with access

to supportive community resources throughout their lifetime.

The mission of the California Department of Aging is to lead and advocate for the dignity, independence, health and community involvement of older Californians, family caregivers and adults with disabilities.

For more information, contact:
California Department of Aging
Office of External Affairs
1600 K Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
Website: <http://www.aging.ca.gov>
E-mail: webmaster@aging.ca.gov
Call: 1-916-322-3887

For information on senior services in your area, please call 1-800-510-2020.

California Department of Aging • 1600 K Street, Sacramento, California 95814 • www.aging.ca.gov



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